

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SS-15 SSO-00 CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00

PM-04 NSC-05 SP-02 NSCE-00 INRE-00 OC-06 CCO-00 OPR-02

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FM AMEMBASSY BUJUMBURA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5654

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUJUMBURA 0862

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, US, BY

SUBJECT: BURUNDI/U.S. BILATERALS

REF: STATE 247704

1. PARA 2 WILL GIVE DETAILS OF OUR CURRENT RELATIONSHIP WITH BURUNDI CUSTOMS. OUR SUGGESTION AS TO HOW THIS SUBJECT MIGHT BE PLAYED IF RAISED IN BILATERALS IS IN PARAS 3 AND 4. PARA 5 CONCERNS BWAKIRA VISIT TO HAVANA.

2. (A) IN RECENT MONTHS NDIRUKUNDO HAS NOT GIVEN US PROBLEMS OVER THE ENTRY AND EXIT OF ANY TYPE OF DIPLOMATIC POUCH AFTER TOP-LEVEL INTERVENTION FORCED HIM TO RELENT FROM PREVIOUS HARASSMENT. HE AND HIS SUBORDINATES RESENT US FOR THAT EPISODE AND PROBABLY HAVE GENERAL ANIMUS AGAINST EMBASSY. THEY HAVE BEEN PETTY AND ANNOYING WITH BEVERAGE AND FROZEN FOOD SHIPMENTS, IMPOSING DELAYS ON CLEARANCE OF BOTTLED GOODS AND ANNOUNCING (BUT SO FAR NOT IMPLEMENTING) THREATS TO DENY US SUCH IMPORTS IN FUTURE BECAUSE WE IMPORT "TOO MUCH" OR BECAUSE ITEMS SHOULD BE BOUGHT LOCALLY (AT HIGHER PRICES AND NOT DUTY FREE).

(B) NDIRUKUNDO INSISTS, AS MATTER OF HIS POLICY, ON INSPECTING ALL AIR FREIGHT AND HOUSEHOLD EFFECTS WHICH ARRIVE FOR EMBASSY PERSONNEL ON DIPLOMATIC LIST AND REFUSES TO ACCEPT VIENNA CONVENTION PROVISION THAT SUCH INSPECTIONS SHOULD OCCUR ONLY IF
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SERIOUS REASON FOR SUSPICION ABOUT CONTENTS EXISTS. HE SAYS

THAT BURUNDI CUSTOMS REGULATIONS REQUIRE THIS (IN FACT, THEY ARE AMBIGUOUS ON SUBJECT), AND THAT THESE REGULATIONS ARE ALL THAT CONCERN HIM, SINCE TERMS OF VIENNA CONVENTION HAS NO DIRECT APPLICABILITY TO FUNCTIONING OF CUSTOMS. WE HAVE NOT CONDUCTED OVERALL SURVEY OF BEHAVIOR BY CUSTOMS TOWARD OTHER EMBASSIES, AND WE SUPPOSE ALL HAVE HAD SCRAPES WITH NDIRUKUNDO AT SOME TIME. HOWEVER, WE KNOW THAT IN RECENT INSTANCES OF ARRIVAL OF EFFECTS OF WEST GERMAN AND EGYPTIAN DIPLOMATS, THERE WAS NO INSPECTION.

(C) PROTOCOL CHIEF AT FOREIGN MINISTRY HAS AGREED WITH OUR INTERPRETATION OF CONVENTION ON INSPECTION OF EFFECTS, BUT HE SAYS THAT HE CANNOT PREVAIL OVER NDIRUKUNDO. FONMIN BWAKIRA AND FINANCE MINISTER MPOZAGARA (NOMINAL BOSS OF CUSTOMS) HAVE BEEN POLITE BUT NON-COMMITTAL WHEN WE HAVE RAISED CUSTOMS PROBLEMS IN PAST WITH THEM. IT IS A FACT THAT NDIRUKUNDO HAS BUILT UP A POWER BASE OF HIS OWN AND, PERHAPS BECAUSE HE IS PRIVY TO SO MUCH TOP LEVEL BURUNDI HANKY-PANKY ON IMPORTS AND EXPORTS, HE IS JUST BARELY UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE HIGHEST AUTHORITIES HERE, EVEN WHEN THEY FINALLY INTERVENE.

3. MY FEELING IS THAT CUSTOMS PROBLEMS HERE SHOULD NOT BECOME ONE OF THE PRINCIPAL FOCI OF THE BILATERALS, BUT, IF THEY TAKE PLACE AT THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY LEVEL, I WOULD UNMISTAKABLY ALLUDE TO THE ISSUE ALONG THE FOLLOWING LINES. I WOULD NOTE OUR HOPE THAT A NEW ERA IN BILATERAL RELATIONS IS OPENING IN WHICH THE U.S. IS SHOWING ITS BACKING FOR BURUNDI'S DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS. YET IT WOULD BE FOOLISH TO OVERLOOK THE INSTANCES OF BURUNDI SUSPICIONS OF USG ATTITUDES AND AMEMBASSY ACTIVITIES, EVEN IN RECENT YEARS. THESE HAVE INCLUDED THE FRACAS OVER TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS EARLY IN 1975, BURUNDI FANTASIES THAT THE U.S. HAS WANTED TO SUPPORT HUTU EXILES BY IMPORTING WEAPONS FOR THEM INTO BURUNDI, AND HARASSMENT OF DIPLOMATIC POUCHES AND OTHER IMPORTS BY CUSTOMS. NOW ALL THAT SHOULD BE PAST. WASHINGTON HAS BEEN GRATIFIED BY THE CLOSE WORKING AND EVEN PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS THAT HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHED IN BUJUMBURA BY AMERICAN AND BURUNDI OFFICIALS AT SENIOR LEVELS, AND WE WOULD HOPE THAT THIS NEW SPIRIT WOULD BE COMMUNICATED ALSO TO LOWER LEVELS, INCLUDING TO OFFICIALS OF THE CUSTOMS SERVICE. IN PARTICULAR, A STRICT ADHERENCE TO THE TERMS AND SPIRIT OF THE VIENNA CONVENTION

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WILL AVOID FUTURE PROBLEMS IN EMBASSY OPERATIONS. THIS WILL BE ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT AT THE U.S. STARTS ITS BILATERAL AID PROJECT, WHICH, INEVITABLY, WILL INVOLVE SOME ADDITIONAL PERSONNEL AND THE IMPORTATION OF EQUIPMENT AND AID MATERIALS FOR THE PROJECT. WE WILL NEED AND EXPECT COOPERATION BY CUSTOMS.

4. I RECOGNIZE THAT IF SENIOR AMERICAN OFFICIAL AT BILATERALS IS ABOVE ASSISTANT SECRETARY LEVEL, FOREGOING PITCH MIGHT SEEM TOO

DETAILED. HOWEVER, EVEN THEN, WITH SOME SHORTENING AND FURTHER GENERALIZATION, BWAKIRA COULD BE GIVEN TO UNDERSTAND THAT OFFICIALDOM IN WASHINGTON IS AWARE OF PAST PETTY HARASSMENTS AND WILL BE WATCHING IN FUTURE AS AID PROJECT STARTS.

5. NUMBER TWO OFFICIAL AT FOREIGN MINISTRY MENTIONED TO ME OCTOBER 7 THAT, AFTER BILATERALS, BWAKIRA WILL BE TRAVELING TO HAVANA TO TAKE UP "LONG STANDING INVITATION" OF CUBANS TO PAY A VISIT. WE HAVE NO EVIDENCE LOCALLY THAT CUBAN-BURUNDI RELATIONS HAVE GONE ANYWHERE AT ALL SINCE CUBAN AMBASSADOR (TO ZAIRE) PRESENTED HIS CREDENTIALS HERE LAST SPRING. BURUNDI MIGHT STILL WANT CUBAN AID IN NICKEL AND SUGAR SECTORS, AND REAL QUESTION IS WHETHER HAVANA WILL SEE ANY BENEFIT IN TRYING TO ESTABLISH A PRESENCE HERE. POSSIBLE CUBAN PRESSURE ON PUERTO RICO ISSUE, WHICH WE HAVE TRIED HARD TO NEUTRALIZE HERE, MIGHT MAKE IT TIMELY TO USE BILATERALS TO REMIND BWAKIRA OF OUR STRONG FEELINGS ON THIS SUBJECT.

MARK

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